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LETTERS.

CARICATURE OF IRVING HOWE

New York City

How ironic that two journals of opinion offered their readers personal diatribes against Irving Howe that masqueraded as reviews of his intellectual autobiography, *A Margin of Hope*. Commentary's review, by Midge Decter, was predictable; *The Nation's*, by Vivian Gornick ["A Life of the Mind," Jan. 1-8], was inexcusable.

Those of us who know and have worked with Howe in Democratic Socialists of America simply cannot recognize him in Gornick's caricature of a "closed, raging, polemical" personality. Rather, Howe is a thoughtful and reasonable man, an individual whose life's work, exemplified by his founding of *Dissent* in 1954, has been in the service of a democratic radicalism.

It is true that Howe and other critics, including this writer ["Life of the Party," *The Nation*, Jan. 28, 1978], have criticized Gornick for her romantic view of America's Communists and for her lack of consideration of their politics. Her review indicates that she has learned little from such criticism.

Gornick gives herself away when she writes that Howe and "the Stalinists sound exactly alike" because "the way all these people speak is more important than what they have to say." Indeed! Is, constant apologia for mass murder no different from a reasoned argument on the necessity of democratic socialism? Howe's strength has been to reject authoritarianism from whatever quarter it emanates—whether from Stalinists on the "left" or from neoconservatives on the New Right. If Gornick would listen to what people say, rather than note only the passion with which they say it, perhaps she would get the point.

Gornick sees Howe's anti-Stalinism as "an amazement," and she charges that his opposition to Stalinism "is so disproportionate as to be psychologically suspect." What is amazing is that one who supposedly welcomes the creation of a socialist movement in America can be so little concerned with it; it was the perpetual defense of Stalinism by "progressives" like Gornick that helped destroy the chances of an emerging, genuine socialist movement.

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THE COSTA RICAN FRONT

Washington, D.C.

Stephen Schlesinger's "Reagan's 'Secret' War on Nicaragua" [*The Nation*, Jan. 1-8] provides a good restatement and amplification of previous accounts of U.S. aggression, covert and otherwise, against Nicaragua. In his conclusion, Schlesinger predicts more of the same strategy, and speculates that Honduras will be the launching pad for a Somocista "winter offensive."

Signs abound, however, that suggest a startling new twist, unmentioned by Schlesinger. While some sort of offensive appears imminent, many insiders have reported to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs that the staging area may have expanded recently from Honduras to include a most unlikely venue—Costa Rica. There are a number of compelling reasons to believe that this country may be used as the embarkation point for a major drive to oust the Sandinists. Costa Rica's new President, Luis Alberto Monge, has become the Reagan Administration's stridently anti-Communist Central American surrogate, and has swapped Costa Rica's traditionally independent foreign policy for the promise of massive U.S. assistance to shore up its sagging economy.

The centerpiece of the plan to open a front in Costa Rica is based on a supposed C.I.A.-engineered agreement with ex-Sandinist Eden Pastora. This former revolutionary, who previously would have nothing to do with the Somocistas or the C.I.A., has recently created an antigovernment military force called the Sandino Revolutionary Front and apparently has agreed to lead an exile army against his former allies, provided that the exile force is cleansed of high-ranking members of Somoza's National Guard, particularly its commander, Enrique Bermudez. U.S. diplomatic officials are whispering that Pastora, who lives in Costa Rica, is already setting up shop along the San Juan River, Costa Rica's boundary with Nicaragua, where exile bands already exist.

How far the Costa Ricans will allow themselves to be drawn into the quagmire is of course impossible to predict. What we do know is that San José no longer vigorously monitors the border region, thus giving free rein to the growing number of armed Nicaraguans stationed in the area. If this scenario is accurate, the Reagan Administration's insistence on a military solution in Central America will only serve to bring closer the hideous possibility of a widespread regional war—Costa Rica included.

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